

LIVING FOR THE RIGHT STUFF

2 Corinthians 5:6-10

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LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/living-for-the-right-stuff/>

Mary Levy was once head coach for the Kansas City Chiefs. At one point, his Chiefs were tied for first place in mid-October and he was asked if this was the greatest thrill of his life. He replied, “No. The doctors removed a large tumor from my wife’s stomach, and the tumor was benign. That is my greatest thrill!” In other words, there is more to life than what we can see, more to success than culture claims.

Columnist Erma Bombeck once wrote a piece entitled, “If I Had My Life to Live Over Again.” In it, she wrote, “I would have invited friends over to dinner even if the carpet was stained and the sofa faded. I would have sat on the lawn with my children and not worried about grass stains. When my child kissed me impetuously, I would never have said, ‘Later. Now get washed up for dinner.’ There would have been more I love you’s, more I’m sorry’s but mostly, given another shot at life, I would seize every minute, look at it and really see it, and never give it back.”

But the Apostle Paul goes further. Eternity provides a helpful perspective for weighing our priorities. Paul knows this earthly home is real but not final (vv. 6-8). You know the old saying: “I’ve never seen a U Haul truck following a hearse to the cemetery.” This is Father’s Day, a good time to assess what we pass down to the generations about what is important and what is not.

Look with me at the way eternity impacted time for the Apostle Paul. In the NRSV translation, Paul uses a form of the word “confident” twice (vv. 6, 8). Because of what Christ has done for us in the Cross and resurrection, Paul’s position is in Christ, so that he does not fear the future. That settled peace offers him assurance and calm. He can have a sort of critical distance from himself and his enemies. He doesn’t always have to win, have to explain things, to prove himself [*Paul and His Letters*, by Leander Keck, p. 129]. To walk by faith is to leave the final tallying to God and to trust this God’s mercy and love.

What was Paul’s life goal? You can read it simply stated in v. 9: to please God. I realize not everyone here has had a great relationship with your earthly father. But in many cases, we might fear our father at first, then grow to respect him, then grow to love him. And our motivation for obedience moves from “not getting caught,” to “not disappointing.” A desire to please God grows out of our relationship with God.

And Paul opens this subject up even further by referring to our final hearing being the judgment seat of Christ (v. 10). We were expecting him to say, “the judgment seat of God,” right? But this shows how the Father has committed all judgment to the Son (John 5:22). This isn’t a judgment scene to determine eternal destiny—that is determined when we by faith receive Christ. This is a judgment of believers, to assess our service and our deeds. Christ judges! Isn’t that good news? This merciful one who reached out hands to heal and help, who was love in the flesh. Christ judges, and that relieves us of so much responsibility! We don’t have to judge others!

There is a sign over the cash register at the National Cathedral gift shop, “We may not have seen you take it, but God did.” This is along the lines of Bonhoeffer’s statement: Everything we do is done in the sight of the Everlasting God. Sooner or later, someone said, we all sit down to a banquet of consequences. We often speak today of a carbon footprint, what we leave behind and contribute to earth care. Paul is speaking here of our spiritual footprint and our moral footprint.

Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard wrote about purity of heart. He described followers of Christ handling competing claims and learning to will one thing. Commitment, he said, purifies the heart. One thing. So here’s a simple test to make sure we are living for the right stuff. Ask yourself, “Will this matter in two days? Two weeks? Two years? Two decades? Two hundred years? Eternity?